MR Almanac

A Train Story

by George Ridge

A train excursion from Prague to Paris provides the vehicle through which the author of this vignette recollects many of the sweeping changes that have shaken and shaped Europe in this century. While governments and wars have rearranged borders and political philosophies throughout Europe, no one could forever alter the grand geographic and social fabric or quash democratic dreams that endured. While Cold-War scars still mark Eastern Europe, they seem to be fading as the healing process continues.—Editor

I don't know what I expected. At the very least there should have been some minor jolt, some bump or ripple in the steel tracks to impair the otherwise smooth passage of our train. "*Die Grenze* (the border)." With sad eyes, a stranger sitting at my elbow in the dining car whispered the German words. Otherwise I would not have known exactly—to the pinpoint. The stranger made no gesture. His voice was barely audible, as if to hide the location even from the freezing, snow-banked countryside that we hurtled across at 90 miles an hour. The border. Certainly not "just" any border—and not even "any" border, anymore.

Our sleek Eurocity express train No. 96, nicknamed "Goethe," 7 hours and 15 minutes out of Prague, 7 hours and 14 minutes from its Paris destination, had just crossed—without incident—the former Iron Curtain between East and West Germany. Maybe the Goethe isn't the Orient Express, but it is a comfortable, businesslike train that travels from the Czech Republic to Paris almost entirely in daylight. It sets a fine table for dining, although the restaurant car reflects the no-nonsense approach of the modern InterCity expresses—plastic and brass with framed travel posters on the walls. But, with picture windows like these, who needs art?

The broad windows, however, do not simply look onto a peaceful, bucolic present. They also gaze into the whole of this turbulent century. I found myself ticking off history as the wheels beneath me chewed away the miles. Prague 1948. Prague 1968. The Velvet Revolution 1989. The Sudetenland 1938. Dresden 1945. Weimar between the wars. The Iron Curtain 1945-89, RIP. The Rhine River north of Mannheim, where Patton's armies crossed in 1945. The Saarland 1936, Hitler's first conquest. The Maginot Line 1940. Metz and Verdun 1914-1918. Chateau-Theirry and Belleau Wood 1918. The Marne River near Paris 1914.

Nearing the millennium on its now-pedestrian daily journey, the Goethe pries open a cross section of central European events that many of us remember. Compared to the technicolor houses of western Germany, Prague and its environs are still cement gray and, at best, a faded goldenrod color that the coming of the sun lifts marginally from overnight drabness. The sun was at stage right, ready for its entrance cue, as I arrived at Holesovice station for a 6:29 a.m. departure. I had spent less than 24 hours in the Czech capital, but that was enough time to make me realize that even though within a week my feet would be back in America—and the contents of my wallet probably still in Paris—my heart would remain in Prague.

I had last seen this country in the early 1980s when it was called Czechoslovakia and the communists were in control. Far happier memories remained with me as the Goethe pulled away from Holesovice station.

Earlier in the week we were afoot on the snow-dusted outskirts of Pilsen when we interrupted our stroll to study a small granite diptych embossed on one side with a winged figure 8. The lower circle of the figure 8 enclosed a white star set on a background of blue. The star had a red center. This was the insignia of the US 8th Air Force, which had not crossed Czech skies since 1945. The monument contained an inscription in Czech. A single strut of bent aluminum was attached to the main tablet.

An American of Czech heritage translated: "In memory of the American flyers shot down on 25 April 1945." Ten names were listed. Certainly this memorial had not been erected under communist rule. Somebody had concealed a piece of World War II bomber wreckage—and a memory—for more than 40 years.

As we continued our short journey, we heard about the "freedom road" being defined across the western reaches of the Czech Republic by such monuments. Marking the American advance through the former Czechoslovakia, the freedom road ends at a more elaborate memorial slightly east of Pilsen. It was along this line from Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad) in the north to Budweis near the Austrian border that General George S. Patton's Third Army soldiers were ordered to await their Soviet allies and the close of World War II.

"Even during the days of communism, it was a source of great pride among the citizens of Pilsen that they, not Prague, had been liberated by Americans," explained a journalist at the English-language newspaper the *Prague Post*. He said friends in Pilsen had told him that in order to dampen this spirit, the communists told the residents of Pilsen and other Bohemian towns that their liberators were actually "Russians dressed in American uniforms in order to confuse enemy forces."

Memories of the footpaths of Bohemia remained as the train tak-

ing me away from Prague entered the valley of the Elbe River. The silvery waters seemed to wash away some of the industrial blight that the northern Czech Republic has come to endure. Only a dusting of snow saved the land from horizon-to-horizon grayness, a sugar-frosting for the towns that reflect neither industrial prosperity nor worker paradise. (Karl Marx much preferred the spa of Karlsbad—named after another Karl.) In Germany, even in the former East, industrial might is more circumspect. Vineyards cover the facade.

Over a satisfying breakfast of soft-boiled egg served cup-style in the European manner, hard German rolls and coffee, I watched the spires of Dresden emerge. East Germany lives on in the gloom of Dresden. Under its lacy steeples, the city remains a hollow core surrounded by boxy communist apartments. With West German money it will be a showplace in a decade, but for now, the scars remain from a single bombing raid 53 years ago almost to the moment of my leisurely breakfast.

We made two stops in Dresden, and the compartments of the train became noticeably more crowded. The tracks of the first station bridged a pedestrian mall where the life of the station went on in the valley below us. On my last trip to the main station I remember patrolling guards silhouetted against the glass skylights. Today, happily, advertising banners are considered more important than overhead security.

Wintery fields punctuated by a series of atomic cooling towers filled my view until we had passed Leipzig and Weimar. Near Weimar a French salesman in my compartment offered me a glass of Alsatian Riesling reserve. We drank a toast to Napoleon's victory at nearby Jena, but that's another century. From this century, I recognized a former Soviet casern atop a hill near Erfurt.

Soon I discovered where the Riesling came from. The dining car was celebrating Alsatian month with a menu that included lake pike on a bed of mild sauerkraut, Alsatian peasant's stew, called *baeckeoffe* and *bettelmanns* soup, a dessert. Sipping the Riesling with my stew, which also used ample white wine in its preparation, I caught the platinum gleam of the Werra River in the distance. This I knew to be near the border fences, towers and minefields that had held the world on tetherhooks for nearly half a century.

Our train sliced apart the diminished Iron Curtain with more ease than I cut the turnip of my stew. There is nothing to mark our passage. Nothing. No guard towers. Even the naked strips in the forest have been re-grown. Its 15 minutes of fame—actually 44 years—are over.

About the only architectural individuality allowed in the former Czechoslovakia or East Germany seemed to be the garden cottages, where the owners made statements of gingerbread from Grimm's tales, playhouse Bavarian and A-frame. What a contrast, but at the same time a similarity, to Frankfurt's muscular aluminum-paneled skyline. An apartment house wore enormous multicolored dunce caps—an architectural plea for individuality much like the garden cottages.

What a joy it was after Saarbrucken to reach the French railbed—the most cushioned in all of Europe. The temptation was to die with the disappearing rose ball of the sun and wake up in Paris. Even ordinary trains attain speeds of 120 miles an hour in France, so the entire sweep of World War I from Metz to the Marne passed by within 2 1/2 hours. We reached Gare de l'Est in Paris a minute early after more than 800 miles—and, don't forget, the century it took to get there. ***MR***

George Ridge is a restaurant and travel columnist for the Arizona Daily Star *in Tucson, Arizona. He was an editor for the European edition of* Stars and Stripes *in Darmstadt, Germany, from 1955 to 1963.*

The Eighth Corps in San Francisco, 1898

by Stephen D. Coats

At the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, the United States challenged Spain's military in the Philippines. Specifically, on 1 May 1898, US naval forces, commanded by Commodore George Dewey, wrestled control of Manila Bay from Admiral Patricio Montojo's Spanish squadron. In the wake of Dewey's quick victory, President William H. McKinley decided to send a land force to occupy Manila. No prewar plans existed to provide a blueprint for this endeavor. Furthermore, the Army, having anticipated commitments off the shores of Florida should the United States go to war with Spain, had already moved most of its regular organizations and logistic support to assembly areas in the Caribbean.

McKinley's decision forced military officials to shift focus to the Pacific. The Army needed a western assembly point where forces, subsequently designated the Eighth Corps, could gather before movement overseas. Securing a Pacific coast port became essential if forces were to reach the Philippines in a timely manner. On 4 May 1898, McKinley informed Secretary of War Russell Alger that troops "should be assembled at San Francisco for such service as may be ordered hereafter."[1]

Several factors account for the selection of San Francisco as the port of embarkation. By 1898, San Francisco was the premier city on the West Coast, boasting a population of over 330,000. It possessed first-rate municipal utilities and telephone and telegraph services. As a transcontinental railroad terminus, the city offered ready access to regular and volunteer forces traveling west for rendezvous. The location featured one of the country's best ports. Transportation overseas could be secured through oceanic steamship companies that maintained headquarters or offices in the city.[2]

San Francisco also sported an Army general depot over which the quartermaster general had direct control. Depending on available stocks,

the military could use this facility and its organization to outfit both regular and volunteer forces converging on the West Coast. Since the 1870s, the Subsistence Department had also maintained a purchasing depot in the city. Through this facility, the commissary acquired fresh beef, flour and other commodities largely through local sources. Feed for livestock, lumber and other products could be secured by subsistence officers to establish bay-area campsites.[3]


Major Oscar F. Long

After deciding where to locate an expeditionary force, McKinley named generals Wesley Merritt and Elwell Otis to quarter, organize, train and prepare designated forces in San Francisco for duty overseas. Drawing on available, but limited, logistic resources from area military organizations, Merritt's command began to accept the thousands of regulars and volunteers arriving at the Golden Gate region. Units initially camped on the Presidio but eventually spilled over into several other locations.

Logistic Challenges

Hastily dispatched to the West Coast, regular and volunteer organizations frequently reached San Francisco lacking essential equipment. The thousands of soldiers also needed daily rations and adequate medical care. The available military facilities and civilian infrastructure was capable of meeting the needs of many units. The challenge was to tap into those sources of aid to provide for the soldier's welfare.

The Army's Ordnance Department supported Benecia Arsenal, a major depot on the Pacific coast, stocked with large quantities of ammunition and .45-caliber Springfield rifles.[4] Located about 43 miles northeast of San Francisco, Benecia afforded easy access to military organizations in need of weapons or munitions.[5] For example, arsenal commander Colonel L.S. Babbitt received orders on 14 May to help supply two 1st Expedition units. Adjutant General Corbin directed Babbitt to provide the 1st California and 14th Infantry battalions "400 rounds per man [and] such arms as necessary to fully arm" the Californians.[6] Four days later, Corbin hastened the partially armed 10th Pennsylvania to San Francisco, knowing that ordnance shortfalls could be made up on the coast.[7] While in camp by the bay, the 7th California, 1st Tennessee, 8th California, 2d Oregon recruits, 1st Nebraska and 1st Montana received Springfield rifles.[8] The arsenal also received ordnance items that would not be taken to the Philippines.[9]


RETREAT ROLL-CALL AT CAMP MERRITT, SAN FRANCISCO

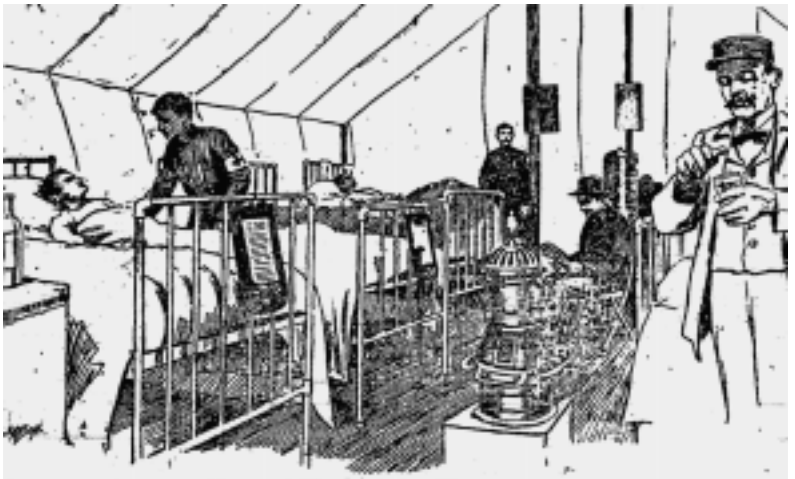
The Subsistence Department operated a purchasing depot in San Francisco.[10] Through this facility, the commissary could obtain and dispense fresh beef, flour and other locally produced commodities.[11] By 1 June, the department's commissary planned to store a three-month supply of substance for 20,000 men.[12] Colonel William H. Baldwin, the purchasing commissary collocated with the depot quartermaster, ordered "immense quantities of supplies."[13] The chief commissary for Camp Merritt estimated that during July, "an average of 9,366 men were fed at a cost to the Government . . . of $43,416."[14] The San Francisco *Chronicle* speculated that much of that sum went to city suppliers. Drawing rations every 10 days, unit commissaries provided their men with beef, bacon, salmon, flour, potatoes, vegetables, coffee, sugar and baking powder.[15]

The Quartermaster Department maintained one of only six Army general depots in San Francisco. Depot Quartermaster Major Oscar Long had a twofold responsibility—arrange oceanic transportation for expeditionary forces and provide assembled organizations with military stores and supplies, including clothing, tents, blankets and "all materials for camp and for shelter for troops and stores."[16] The second task seemed formidable. By 1 May, "nearly all war material available had been sent from San Francisco to the East."[17] When the Army ordered regular forces to camps going to the Caribbean, the quartermaster general moved tons of stores for their support. Long wrote that re-positioning goods left "this depot almost wholly without any stock to speak of, except tents, on hand, with which to meet the emergency."[18]

To compound Long's problem, in early May, McKinley urged governors to dispatch volunteer organizations with all speed. If regiments were not fully equipped but able to travel, War Department officials suggested "that it is best they go ahead and complete their equipment at San Francisco."[19] Before May ended, the depot quartermaster learned that the projected force to gather by the bay had increased from 6,000 to 20,000.[20] As a result, Long reported:

"Regiments, battalions and detachments arrived from 20 states and territories of the Union, some even without shoes and wearing bandannas in lieu of hats—without tentage, with nothing for comfort and even without the few necessities which suffice for the simple needs of the soldier."[21]

Long specifically cited several regiments in dire need of help. "The troops from Montana, Kansas and Tennessee were almost entirely unequipped."[22] Even those from Colorado, Iowa and Pennsylvania who had telegraphed that they had their basic gear "were found, when their requisitions were filled, to be deficient in the most essential requirements of equipment."[23] A correspondent for the *Examiner* reported on the 1st Idaho's clothing deficiencies when the regiment reached San Francisco: "Many of the men had no uniforms, some of them were poorly dressed, but all of them look well. The fact is that but two companies of the eight, that is to say 168 men out of 672, are fully equipped."[24]



In the Red Cross Hospital Tent of the Third Brigade at Camp Merritt.

To address these equipment shortfalls, Long acted quickly to replenish stocks in his depot, and San Francisco reaped the dividend. He flooded the Golden Gate and other West Coast cities with quartermaster requests. On 19 May, Long told a *Chronicle* correspondent: "Our orders for clothing and supplies for the expedition are keeping busy every factory that makes them in this city and on the Pacific coast. We have reached out to Portland and other cities, wherever there are mills. The government is spending a vast amount of money in this affair. At least 10,000 working men and women in San Francisco are today occupied on Government contracts. We have ordered 8,000 uniforms, identical in color with the ordinary fatigue uniforms but lighter in weight. We have also ordered 1,200 canvas uniforms for wear in Manila, all to be delivered in a few days."[25]

In addition to uniforms, the depot quartermaster let contracts for the manufacture of shoes, overcoats, overalls and drawers.[26] To expedite procurement, Long acquired "all other supplies which were obtainable ready made in the market."[27] Articles obtained in this manner included blankets, shoes, stockings, suspenders, undershirts, axes and bedsheets.[28]

The depot quartermaster issued supplies as quickly as they could be purchased or "as promptly as 6,000 workmen employed in this city night and day in manufacturing could furnish them"[29] Men from the 1st California regiment received an issue of shoes on 17 May. The 7th California acquired over 900 complete uniforms on 27 May. Kansas volunteers obtained uniforms, and the 1st Tennessee finally secured trousers, shirts, blouses, underclothes and shoes. Soldiers from the 1st Colorado and 7th California welcomed an issue of underwear.[30] The quartermaster's challenge was to meet the troops' needs before shortages led to operational or welfare problems. Given the paucity of stocks, combined with the arrival of organizations lacking equipment, Long and his fellow Pacific Department officers did not always possess the means to quickly supply soldiers.

Medical Support

Medical Department personnel confronted a similar situation—the need to provide an essential service with limited assets. Although organizations converging on San Francisco brought their own medical support—each volunteer regiment was authorized one surgeon, two assistant surgeons and three hospital stewards—such small staffs could be easily overwhelmed should virus or disease infect the hundreds of soldiers.[31]

To compound the challenge facing regimental surgeons, two higher headquarters in the area possessed scant facilities to render medical assistance. The Army's regional command, the Department of California, could access only one military health care asset in the bay area—the post hospital, Presidio of San Francisco. The structure was a small, frame building large enough to accommodate "the ordinary number of sick of two companies."[32] Fortunately, the Presidio also served as home to a United States Marine Hospital.

Established on the reservation in 1875 "to combat cholera, yellow fever and general unsanitary conditions existing among seamen," the Marine Hospital was operated by the Treasury Department.[33] During the war, the Treasury secretary allowed the Army's surgeon general to use vacant beds at these facilities.[34]

The Department of the Pacific (later given the additional title of Eighth Corps) did not establish a division hospital until 30 May. Composed of three large double hospital tents, the field facility was "capable of accommodating forty men."[35] Before then, military medical treatment came through meager unit resources or a brigade hospital formed from pooling regimental holdings.[36]

Unfortunately, sickness could not be postponed until Merritt's department prepared itself to meet medical emergencies. On 18 May, a volunteer

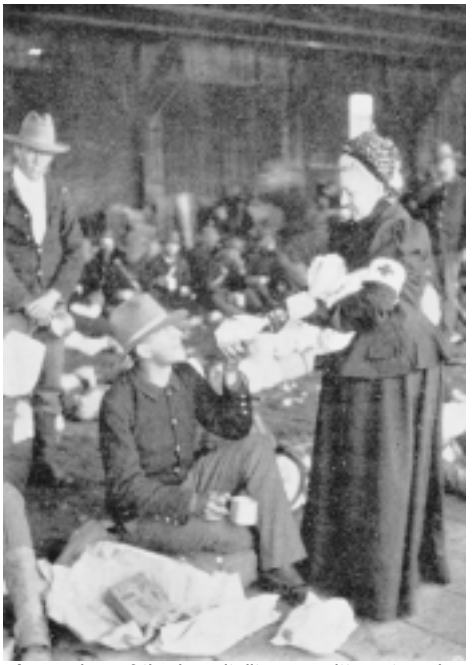
in the 2d Oregon contracted measles.[37] By 21 May, several other cases developed within the regiment. A "rigid quarantine" helped prevent the communicable, virus disease from reaching epidemic proportion.[38] Nevertheless, measles infection spread to others. The 20th Kansas reported a case on 23 May.[39] Major W.O. Owen, chief surgeon in charge of the division hospital, noted that 50 patients were being treated for measles on 11 June.[40] Shortly thereafter, the disease threatened to infect much of the camp when the 1st Tennessee arrived at the Golden Gate with 18 cases already developed.[41] The field hospital, by that time in operation for nearly three weeks, took the lead to ensure the contagion stayed in check.

Over time, other maladies appeared among the troops. Unit surgeons reported treating non-life-threatening "minor diseases usual in military camps," such as diarrhea, bronchitis, mumps, gonorrhea and syphilis.[42] Medical officials surmised that diarrhea could be traced to assorted causes—"exposure to cold and dampness" at campsites; "irregularity of diet in the shape of over-indulgence in pies, sweetmeats, fruits, etc., procured by the men or forced upon them by injudicious friends; [and] the excessive use of alcoholic stimulants in various forms indulged in by some of the men."[43]

Surgeons believed the command's health would improve with an assault on wretched camp hygiene and poor personal habits. Until such corrections were made medical officers feared that any "minor disease" unchecked could weaken a soldier's resistance to more serious disorders, including pneumonia, typhoid fever and cerebrospinal meningitis.[44] All of which subsequently developed within the several Gold Gate encampments. Treatment for each disorder demanded medical aid exceeding the military facilities' capabilities.

Community Volunteer Spirit

San Francisco area citizens rallied to offer assistance. One unforeseen and fortuitous dividend of McKinley's decision to assemble forces in the Bay Area was the extent to which the civilian community embraced its uniformed visitors. Given the paucity of available military medical and morale support, the San Francisco community worked through local relief societies and religious organizations on behalf of the expeditionary forces.



A member of the hospitality committee at work.

Much of the Red Cross work in various camps focused on providing "necessaries for the care and comfort of the soldiers in cases where the government does not supply such necessaries."[45] That broad mandate covered medical care, food and clothing and in some cases, strong advice to the Army on how to improve troop welfare. The Red Cross exerted an influence over the military unlike any other private organization of the era. While careful not to abuse their relationship with the Army, Red Cross officials nevertheless prodded the service to take action on issues related to soldiers' well-being.

Certainly the Red Cross prioritized medical care. Work in this area constituted the organization's greatest contribution to soldiers who assembled in San Francisco. During May, in particular, when Merritt's command struggled to establish adequate medical facilities, the Red Cross moved to assist the military. On 13 May, members of the society's executive committee secured permission from the presidio's chief surgeon to erect a large hospital tent on the military installation and offered to manage the "more serious cases" admitted to the installation's brigade hospital.[46] By 18 May, Presidio's Red Cross tent included 13 patients who variously suffered from a fractured ankle, measles and tonsillitis. Three experienced male nurses volunteered their services to help oversee operations.[47]

As more troops poured into San Francisco and the camps expanded, demand for medical care became even more acute. Using vacant beds in the Treasury Department's Marine Hospital assisted military surgeons; but it did not alleviate the need for more facilities.[48] To cope with this predicament, both the military and the Red Cross welcomed assistance from local civilian hospitals.

As early as 21 May, three days after troops arrived at the Bay District Race Track area, San Francisco's French Hospital offered to open a ward to military patients.[49] The Red Cross helped move soldiers afflicted with serious maladies into this civilian facility. Over the next 10 days, the hospital attended a total of 100 troops.[50] On 13 June, the facility reported that 40 soldiers occupied beds in its free ward.[51] Soldiers sent to the hospital often suffered from pneumonia, meningitis, typhoid fever and bronchitis.[52] To alleviate some of the demand for care, the Red Cross opened another medical tent furnished with "iron bedsteads, bed clothing, wardrobes and other necessary equipments" adjacent to the French Hospital.[51] By 20 July, the French Hospital patient count had dropped to 23 soldiers, in part because other civilian hospitals had volunteered to help.[54]

One week after the French Hospital tendered its services, the German Hospital followed suit. The facility extended free care to troops too ill to be treated in the Red Cross tents.[55] Later, St. Luke's made a similar offer.[56] Essentially, the Red Cross and

San Francisco-area medical facilities joined in a patient evacuation process that dispatched soldiers through four progressive stages: regimental, brigade/division, Red Cross and local civilian hospitals.

Regimental surgeons and hospital corpsmen lacked resources to care and provide for all who warranted medical attention. To assist, the ladies threw themselves into a host of projects designed to alleviate the suffering of troops. Troops in need of services the military did not provide could find aid. Hospital committee members were among the busiest of female volunteers.

Like the Red Cross, the Catholic Truth Society (CTS) volunteered its services as well. Although CTS members prioritized spiritual work in the camps, they devoted part of their ministry to the men's material and physical well-being. Women affiliated with the CTS or the Catholic Ladies' Aid Society led support efforts. These volunteers formed committees organized around major tasks.

Like some women affiliated with Red Cross organizations, Catholic ladies visited the sick and convalescent. Hospital committee members tended to those with minor ailments who were "compelled to lie in their hot tents through the day without the care of a doctor and deprived of food other than coarse Army fare."[57] They brought soldiers food baskets composed of the appropriate "delicacies."[58] Baskets often contained calves' foot jelly, wine jelly, beef tea, oranges and fresh eggs.[59]

The ladies' efforts did not go unappreciated. Troops certainly cherished their work. In a letter to the Catholic Ladies' Aid Society on behalf of those ill in Company D, Private Nathan McCorkle of the 51st Iowa Regiment thanked the women for assistance rendered. McCorkle expressed gratitude for the milk and "delicacies" that the ladies delivered to his comrades.[60]

One state commander in chief also recognized the aid provided. On 18 July, Montana Governor Robert R. Smith wrote the Society, thanking members for "the kind and generous ministration of your Society to our sick and needy soldiers."[61] He closed his note with an expression of hope that their "good work will meet with deserved recognition both in this world and in the life to come."[62] Smith justifiably acknowledged the society's efforts on behalf of his state's volunteers. Each morning a CTS worker checked with the regiment's company first sergeants to learn of men reported sick. The ladies used company stoves to prepare foods for those too ill to leave their tents.[63]

The ladies also worked among other military organizations. On 8 June, local hospitals dismissed 25 men from the 1st Idaho Regiment to recuperate from a bout with the measles. The soldiers reached the Idaho encampment late in the afternoon. Knowing the men would have to sleep on the ground with only one blanket, the regimental surgeon requested that the Society provide one additional blanket to each for their recovery. Representatives found one dry goods store still open for business. They paid $5 for each blanket and donated them to the men.[64]

In a noteworthy exception to the otherwise superb relations between the Society and the military, the *Daily Report* revealed on 8 June that "ladies of the [CTS] have complained that the people in charge of the field hospital do not give proper care to the patients."[65] Certainly there were grounds for criticism. Physicians at the Independent Division's hospital did not have the necessary supplies to care for their wards. On 15 June, doctors asked the Society for "linseed and cottonseed oil and other drugs for the ninety-five patients under their charge."[66] The ladies dispatched the necessary medications.

When demand for medical care exceeded both military and civilian capabilities, the Catholic ladies took steps to secure aid. Like the Red Cross, they referred seriously ill troops to local hospitals. Unlike the Red Cross, they did not operate medical facilities. Some of the sick were sent to the French Hospital. When patients began to exceed the "free ward's" 35-bed capacity, the Society spent the "nominal sum" of $10 a week for additional patient care. The ladies sent others, some of whom were afflicted with pneumonia and tonsillitis, to St. Mary's, which offered 12 beds, and the Waldeck Hospital, which provided free space for four patients.[67]

The San Francisco community assumed an invaluable role in the care of Army troops that gathered at the Golden Gate when it became clear that the Army did not possess sufficient resources to accommodate the welfare needs of all the units assembled. Often acting through or in support of the Red Cross, numerous hospitals, church groups, school children and business people collaborated with others in the community to secure medical assistance, personal items, welcoming festivities and financial support. As these societies worked to improve the health and care of their target recipients, other organizations emerged to look after the troops' morale. Together, the US Army and San Francisco community succeeded in dispatching seven expeditions to the Philippines before the armistice in August 1898. ***MR***

NOTES

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Stephen D. Coats is an associate professor of Joint Operations at the US Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC). He received a B.S. from the US Military Academy, an M.A. from the University of Wisconsin and a Ph.D. from the University of Kansas. He graduated from CGSC and served with the 9th Infantry Division, 3d US Infantry (The Old Guard) and 7th Infantry Division (Light). His World War II Almanac article "The Allied Campaign for the Aleutians" appeared in the May 1993 issue of Military Review.